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THE PERISCOPE

By
HOWARD W. HARTLEY
Staff Correspondent
Florida News Service

Storm Warnings.
Blocs Organized.
Sheriffs Lay An Egg.
Civil Service For Cops.
Tallahassee, March 30, Florida's

1939 Legislature convenes here next Tuesday amid the usual pomp and ceremony, wherein leaders will be formally elected for

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P-1

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the upper and lower divisions and Senators and Representatives will clasp hands in solemn pledge to work in harmony for the best interests of the commonwealth.

Nevertheless, your correspondent detects beneath the surface a undercurrent of impending guerrilla warfare between the big and little county blocs which may develop into a replica of the historic "battle of the 100 days" fought on Leon county's red clay hills back yonder in 1931.

Eight years ago, a Legislature convened with every outward sign pointing to perfect harmony and a fine spirit of cooperation. Eight years ago, both the House and the Senate apparently were controlled by the Administration. But there was a tiny storm cloud on the horizon back in 1931, so big that your hand but carrying a threat of becoming the advance guard of a legislative hurricane. If you scan the heavens today, you will find that same old cloud except that the promised gales of 1939 will roar through the House and Senate chambers, not because of any attempt to reallocate the state's gasoline tax but because the fate of the counties' revenue from pari-mutuel gambling hangs in the balance.

Unfortunately for the big county contingent, the first wallop in the current strife was struck in Dade county with the filing of a suit contesting the constitutionality of dividing pari-mutuel revenue in 67 equal parts. Just as unfortunate, too, was the announcement by State Senator Robert H. Graham, of Miami, that he intended to ask the Senate to investigate the political activities of Joseph E. Widener, patriarch of Miami's beautiful track. Equally unfortunate was the removal of demands by Miami merchants for legislation cutting racing at all tracks to five days each week. In all justice to all concerned, let it be said that the petitioner in the litigation, Senator Graham and the merchants are quite sincere in what they are attempting to do. Whether they have axes to grind is beside the point. The question is whether this mass attack on Florida's racing industry hasn't started a swell big county little county war just at a time when all hands should be sitting steadily in the boat.

No matter what you think about it, Florida's legislature apportionment gives the balance of power, either House or Senate, to the little counties. Two-thirds of the people are represented, roughly, by one-third of the membership in the Legislature. So what? So the little counties, who tasted blood back in 1931, are forming a united front this year to stop any attempts to (1) upset the present gas tax allocation (2) disbur race-track revenue and (3) call a constitutional convention for the purpose of revamping Florida's organic law so that the present legislative apportionment might be revised.

In speaking with the leaders of the 1939 little county bloc, your correspondent has been impressed with the fighting spirit that apparently permeates the entire organization. This outfit, incidentally, is commanded by some of the smartest legislators in either branch. Artillery already has been wheeled into position and the Big Bertha is a county unit bill, patterned after Georgia, but so streamlined to fit the Floridians' situation.

Going over into the other camp, we find an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Some hold the county unit bill is unconstitutional in that it contravenes the whole theory of elections. But the leaders of the big county group are mighty unhappy about the racing issue and foresee plenty of trouble ahead, unless oil is poured on the atomy waters.

Insofar as the tracks are concerned, we find the representatives of both the horse and dog ovals playing ball with the little county crowd, realizing their power. The track crowd, therefore, believes a battle between the bloc

will result in the defeat not only of the five day bill but some sort of compromise that will leave the present pari-mutuel setup in status quo.

In spite of earlier indications that they would support a proposed state constabulary, Florida's sheriffs have endorsed a highway patrol bill, which has drawn editorial scorchings from many newspapers. Under the sheriff's plan, patrols would be organized in each county, commanded by the sheriff and financed out of fines and bond forfeitures. Since there is very little money in these county funds, it is easy to imagine what would happen if the sheriff's bill becomes law. We would have sixty-seven speed traps in Florida because the county road patrols would have to depend upon money levied against erring motorists for their salaries.

So the sheriff's road patrol bill has muddled the state constabulary waters so badly that it is difficult to determine just what may happen. A poll of the House, however, shows a whopping majority in favor of state drivers' license and revenue from this source would be ample to finance a real state constabulary, leaving a tidy balance for the establishment of a criminal investigation laboratory in Gainesville.

Backed by the Florida Peace Officers Association, a bill will be introduced to bring under the protection of civil service all municipal policemen in the state. The sheriffs are not interested in this measure but can be counted on to oppose any attempts to extend

civil service to their deputies. Reason is a civil service deputy could be discharged only for cause and after public hearings, making it difficult for a newly-elected sheriff to clean house and find jobs for his political henchmen. Similar opposition is expected from state department heads and for the same cause.

Protests against the cost of social reforms are being heard in Belgium.

To transport diplomatic documents and mail matter exclusively, a motor truck service has just been opened between Chungking and Yunnan-fu, in China.

Colombia now has no unemployment and so serious labor troubles.

When Siam's thirteen-year-old King Ananda visited a fair near the Bangkok Royal Palace, he took his luxury motorcycle along to use in touring the exhibits.

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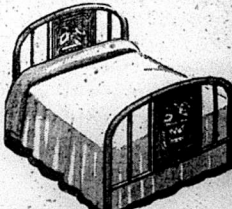
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